

2015

## Reggie Eggleston

Reggie Eggleston  
*Longwood University*

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.longwood.edu/oralhistrvff>



Part of the [Arts and Humanities Commons](#), and the [Social and Behavioral Sciences Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Eggleston, Reggie, "Reggie Eggleston" (2015). *Rural Volunteer Fire Fighters*. Paper 7.  
<http://digitalcommons.longwood.edu/oralhistrvff/7>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the The Virginia Oral History Collection at Longwood University at Digital Commons @ Longwood University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Rural Volunteer Fire Fighters by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Longwood University. For more information, please contact [hinestm@longwood.edu](mailto:hinestm@longwood.edu).

**Interviewers:** Molly Craig, Nick Shaeffer, Lauren Layman, James Cox, Leonie Verstraete

**Interviewee:** Reggie Eggleston

Lauren Layman- So were going to ask you to state your first and last name and spell it for us

Reggie Eggleston- Okay, first name is going to be Reggie r-e-g-g-i-e. Last names Eggleston, e-g-g-l-e-s-t-o-n

LL- This interview is being recorded for use by Longwood University, any information given may be made public. I'm Lauren Layman, it's November 7<sup>th</sup> and were at prospect fire department

James Cox- I'm James Cox, it's November 7<sup>th</sup> and we're at Prospect fire department

Leonie Verstraete- I'm Leonie Verstrate, it's November 7<sup>th</sup> and were at the fire department in Prospect

Molly Craig- I'm Molly Craig, it's November 7<sup>th</sup> and we are at Prospect fire department. Okay, how long have you been living in the area?

RE- I've been living in the area since 1958

MC- Where did you come- where did you move from?

RE- I moved from Rice, Virginia.

MC- Do you like it better than-?

RE- Well, I moved here when I was 8 years old when my dad got married and my mother has died when I was a year old. So he raised me until I was 8, then he married and then we moved to Prospect and I've been here ever since

MC- Do you like living here?

RE- Oh yeah, I love it here. I like the country setting, I like it being quiet. And my business as a 911 dispatcher in Farmville you got all these frequencies, all these noise and I live out in the country where it's quiet and I was raised up on the farm too. So it's-, when you-, I- I just like it being quiet, you know, you're so nailed to the wall for waiting for the 911 phones to rings, that once you get off, you can go home and it's real quiet. You know, you know the trees and

everything you know, I just- it's just a great country setting. I guess I'm just a country boy at heart.

MC- How long have you worked with the department?

RE- This is my second time around. This time I've been there since 1999. The first time I started in 1972 was doing police, fire and rescue before there ever was a 911. Then they came up with this new thing they said we going to start a 911 center and they wanted me to head it up and if I had known this was coming I would've brought you the thing in 1976 where they started the 911 thing. I worked for the police department from 72 to 76 in Farmville and then we started the 911 center we were just fire and rescue at the time. The town of Farmville took over the 911 thing and we were – by the sheriff's department so then I became a jailer with the sheriff's department and then I drove the mail truck for the postal service for 6 years and then the job came open again in 1999 and I've been at the 911 center here ever since.

MC- Nice, why did you decide to join?

RE- Well, I've always been, you know, volunteer related. I've got 25 years volunteer with rescue squad, and 5 years, at that time, with this department and 5 years with the Farmville fire department, but my main thing was the rescue squad. It's just we didn't have any rescue people in the area at that time, so we joined- we started the rescue squad and it's just you know, at that time, we did a lot of transports to Richmond. You know, when the medical field was in its infancy, when it first started but it's all improved now. And I feel like, of all the 7 fire departments and rescue squads I know all these people, I work with them. So, I handle 7 fire departments in the county and 3 rescue squads and it all comes in the 911 system. So it- I just like doing stuff like that. It's sort of a family atmosphere

MC- What do you enjoy most about the department?

RE- I enjoy the comradery that we have.

MC- Yeah, what do you enjoy the least, if there is any?

RE- Uh well, It um- I wouldn't say that I enjoy anything the least, it's- it's when you go out on calls, some calls are bad, you know, sometimes you just have to get your head in the right place.

MC- What was the most memorable call you've ever been on?

RE- Well the one- the most memorable call I had was the Longwood fire. We had- I just happened to be working that night and took an original call on 911 when the rotunda was on fire. And I've got an audio of it, I've played it for the group before. We handled 11 fire departments and 172 people and I was handling all of those at one time

MC- Was that the scariest call or was there any other scary calls?

RE- Well, I mean, we have a lot of stuff that we have handled. You know, you've got accidents with fatalities and you got people who are burning up in cars and we've got – of course you guys- y'all probably know about the quadruple murders in town that I was working in on First Avenue.

MC- Oh no, will you tell us about that?

RE- What was his name- McCroskey I believe his name was?

JC- Yeah

RE-Yeah, McCroskey I was working part of that. And then during that, I had- worked a thing down in rice where a kid cut a guy's head off, you know. But you know it's a lot of band calls you need to handle .The calls that really affect me are the infant calls. You know, you got a kid who has a seizure or quits breathing or a kids in a car wreck. But the most memorable one I was the Longwood fire. If y'all come back and Tracy lets me know I'll play you the excerpt of what was going on at that time. See at that time nothing was digital, everything was analog. Back then you didn't have computers, you wrote it down on pieces of paper as to what everything was.

MC- Is there any other interesting calls we should know?

RE- well you know we had a call here right just on 460 where a car burst into flames and we had two fatalities in that and they burned up in that because we couldn't get too them, the fire was too hot you couldn't get to them

MC- Oh wow, as there ever a call that made you want to quit?

RE: um not say I would want to quit, it made me want to take a break, but ya know with the 911 dispatchers you are the calming force behind everybody else. IF you get excited, then everybody else gets excited. So you have to provide a calming voice and you got to let them know you can

get them what they need. That's just what we do and whatever you want we can get for them like helicopters. Like down here we had a bad accident, head on accident were we had to land two helicopters down here at the church down here in the process. I was off that day and had to set up two landing zones with the fire department, and, and one turned out to be a fatality later on. But uh, it's a lot of bad stuff that you got to deal with but and some point when you're working 911, your just waiting for when 911 rings you don't know if it's going to be minimal or if it's going to be a full blown out thing. Ya know, we , ya know, back in the 80s we had a school bus that had turned over, run into a dump truck and ya know you pull up on the scene with the rescue squad and you see all these people laying out in the road. Come to find out some of them were hurt but there was no fatalities in that.

MC: What do you think is one of the most valuable rewards one can gain from working with the fire department?

RE: well, I think number one would be your helping your fellow, man. Ya know if you don't do it, who is going to do it? Ya know it's just, it's just something you volunteer your time. Um, back before we had a rescue squad a good friend of mine back when we were going to school back in high school was in a terrible wreck, there was no rescue squads at the time. He was strapped in the car, there was no one to get him out. That's when funeral homes brought their nurses to bring people to the hospital. See I go back a long time. But ya know it uh, it gives you a sense of pride. Just like we uh, I always tell people, because I'm known as more of a jokester, all of our trucks are yellow. We tell all the other fire departments that the other trucks are red and white, we tell them that the fire is scared of yellow and when prospect gets there with the yellow trucks the fire sees them and gets scared and goes out.

MC: What has changed over the past 20 years in the community?

RE: The main thing you see is the population is growing older. We get a lot more rescue calls. Back when I first started, if you ran, or if you handled 70 calls a year, you had a busy year. Now routinely we have 10-15 calls a day. Ya know some days you don't have any some days you have more. A lot of times you'll have 2 or 3 rescue squads rolling, 2 fire departments out, But the population is getting older, it looks like that people are not as safety minded now as they were back then. To me that's what it looks like. That's my personal opinion. There just not as

safety minded ya know. Were as people before back in the olden, I call them the olden days, people took care of everybody else no nobody gives a rats thing about anything ya know. So

LV: How do you feel about that?

RE: I think its gone worse. That's what I think so.

MC: Has anything changed over the past few years in the fire department? Or any of the fire departments?

RE: Oh yes. The training is a lot better. Right now, see back before you went into burning houses with no protective equipment on. Now you go in with air packs and full protective equipment. And you uh have a better idea through your training of how fire reacts. You know, just like if you had a fire in this room and ya know were in here standing on the outside, years ago we would just knock the door down and come on in. Well now we know to feel the door because if you get that influx of air you get that flash over where it would blow you back out of the room ya know. So the training it really helps a lot and you got a lot of people who are willing to help you understand about fire departments. Were before you had minimum equipment now, we at prospect have top rate equipment. We are the only fire department of the seven that has an - for accidents and if you saw the traffic cones, we are the only ones that have traffic cones now. And ya know our auxiliary has helped us a lot to save up a lot to get this equipment. We got good equipment and well get called up a lot and help out other departments. [phone rings]

MC: Have you ever had to make a difficult decision as a fire fighter?

RE: So you have to make a decision of the one who is probably going to make it. Like in a housefire, you know one is just not going to make it. And you know one that there is a possibility that you can save them. You have got to forget about the one who is not going to make it.

MC-What is the most appealing part of being a fire-fighter?

RE-Well, an appealing part is that you know, to repeat yourself, you help your fellow man and you are helping people in the community. Just like today we are doing a fund raiser so we can operate for the next year. That is all we ask, it's just to help to operate for the next year. But it is

the good people in the community that do it, and it is not per say a social club, because the fire department isn't a social club, but the community is actually drawing as you can come around and people come help and support you. It is a good thing and I enjoy it, plus: you are surrounded with the people on training nights you know, you know, you have different ideas and you sort it out or you do scenarios. Just like when I don't remember the date, but we had a call way out of our district, we had 800 acres of planted pines on fire over in Dillwyn and they were calling all fire departments in, and i handling that call too. They would have firetrucks and the fire teams would tell you where to go and the communication was not good. But the communication is a lot better now. Where with the walky-talky's before... See when i started out you had dispatch rescue squads by cb radio. Jokes: you guys probably do not even know what a cb radio is. Not only the communication is better now, the people are also better with understanding. We have gone from using ten codes to planned language now. In Prince Edward county if you had ten codes like a ten-fifty is a motor vehicle accident. So you have got PD, PI. PD is proper damage, PI is personal injury. And the only codes that we use now is green, yellow, red and black. People out in scanner land are listening to you all the time and of course the green you're walking wounded, yellow are your people who are somewhat serious and red is more serious and black is dead. Just like September 11, 2001: the rescue squad was charged if it had been anybody living at that time, to go to Doswell and meet people from D and taking them to - . But it turned out no one lived through it. But it is all a bunch of mutual agreements, so it is a rewarding thing just to get out and do it. An old friend of mine here who is dead now, we were both involved, he was always involved in fire departments and I was always involved with the rescue squad and fire department both. So in the end it was just too much so at that time when we were at the fire department we always had a competition. He would be on scene and we would be setting out with the ambulance and there was a house on fire and I would check my watch and he would be scoffling.

MC-Do you have any stories that you would want someone to know in a 100 years from now from either your life or the department?

RE-Well, we started out in 1960 and it was just an idea. We have grown to an 8 piece apparatus. I would like people to know that when we started this thing we would have never thought it

would become this big. When we started there used to be one fire department in Farmville and now we have a lot more, Pamplin, and Prospect and Darlington Heights and \_. It is all built from the same idea, it is just like a cascading thing. People get into it. Now we have people that are first responders, people are trained now in either fire fighter or basic pump operations. Some people do different things. Before you would pump from a pond but now we have a portable pump for house fires. In a 100 years from now I just want people to know that we had this idea and it blossomed out.

MC-Do you have any stories from your life that you would like people to know?

RE- I have been involved in police and fire rescue works since 1972. I'm sort of a \_ people down at the 911 center. I just like living fire department rescue squads, telling people old war stories.

MC: Would you recommend to other people to volunteer?

R: Oh yes. Always volunteer. It's a rewarding experience. You can gain a lot from the people you work with and you can gain a lot of people where you don't know in the community. You can gain their respect as well for what you do

LV: Do you see that people are grateful or that they respect you just for what you do.

R: for the most part they do. I won't say they are 100% but I'll say 95% kind of respect you just for what you do.

MC: what about the other 5%?

R: They're just stupid

MC: how so?

R: they just don't understand what it takes to run a department. When you're outside you'll see all the stuff people give us, it's really just not very good stuff, but people will come and just buy it. Some people say, "well I pay my taxes". Well taxes don't cover fire departments, you know? These people, they just don't understand what you do and what you are all involved in. They see a fire truck go down the road, they see people blowing the sirens and they are just like "Oh they just want to blow them sirens". They don't understand that they're telling people to get out of the way. It's like when I used to years ago, when I was with Farmville fire department. We were always have fire\_\_\_ we can all the fire trucks we can have all the fire trucks ride through the streets and blow the siren. People would complain "I don't want to hear all this noise, all this noise". I said (course you know back then I would tell them) "well when you hear this siren, you know you have a volunteer fireman that's there to help you out. You should go ahead and shake their hands and thank you."

LV: If you could change anything in the coming years, would you want to see change here?

RE: I would like to see the county have more funding for the fire departments. Not only do we have to go on calls and middle of the day, middle of the night but you also gotta raise funds to make sure that you're department operates. Nobody's gonna give you anything, like with the fuel or the insurance. I would like to see the county fully funded departments still keep it volunteer but that way it would give us a break from having to do all the fundraisers that we have to do to keep the department running. Just recently with the air bottles that we have, the 30-minute air bottles you have on your back, they have to replace that every 5 years. We just had to buy 16 of them, maybe 15 but they're \$600 a piece. But that is something I would like to see. You know the county actually realized that they need to fully fund the departments. Now they give us some money now but most of that goes towards truck payments and insurance on the equipment on the men. It's not enough so we still have to do fundraisers.

MC: How much do you usually make from fundraisers? Does it make a lot of enough?

RE: Well, it doesn't make enough to operate. We have different things we have to do fundraisers, gun raffling in the spring, we do this thing today's we hope of course with the

weather we hope we do a lot. This fundraiser we're bringing around \$7,000, but with the price of fuel \_\_\_\_\_. If you got a house fire these trucks go 4 miles a gallon and if you have 4 hoses off of them pumping, then you don't get that much. It's nothing unusual to bring home a gallon of fuel on fire. A hundred gallons of fuel even at the price now, safely easy can be 3 dollars. You spend that right off the bat, plus the hose are not cheap. This truck we got which we're making payments on now are \$350,000 we're making \$35,000 monthly payments on that.

MC: Would you say the Harvest fest is pretty successful on raising money?

It is successful at raising money, it just depends on the price you can get, how the economy is going. It's just like anything else. When the economy is good, we do better and when the economy is bad we do worse. The Harvest festival is a big thing, we've been doing it for a while. I think for 56 years now.

MC: Have you been attending all of them?

RE: Ever since I joined I have.

MC: What's your favorite memory from the harvest festival?

RE: we, it's sort of a funny thing, we were getting ready to have an auction and we catch a house fire. Well everybody goes to the house fire and today everybody has to do, but when you get on call or a house fire, that all goes out the window, so you got to do 2 or 3 different things at one tie. If it weren't for auxiliary, we would just be up the creek without a paddle.

LV: Yeah, well I think we run through our questions

MC: Thank you so much

RE: I'm happy to do it. If Tracy can set you all up, if she wants to do it, I'll bring my CD of the Longwood Fire (department). To let you know how things went back then.

LL: Yeah that would be really cool.

RE: I mean you have French Hall you have your \_\_\_\_\_. I believe it was Arc, there was another building too but we had every fire department in the county there. Now you got to think to yourself that whose covering those stations while they are there. So you got to have a move up system. If Appomattox came down, then Concord got to cover Appomattox and Pamplin district. We had Rice there and which means Ameila would have to come cover their district or even Breckford would have to cover their district and Charlotte Courthouse would have to cover \_\_\_\_\_'s district. So it's all a big roll- up thing, if what you might do, you might talk to the town manager come by the 911 center and see the other side of it.

LV: You have really interesting stories. We were wondering if you would want to take a picture with us?

RE: Sure, glad to.